

The role of non-governmental organisations and faith-based organisations in achieving Education for All: the case of Sierra Leone

Mikako Nishimuko*

Institute of Education, University of London, London, UK

Sierra Leone, one of the world's poorest countries, experienced a civil war from 1991 to 2002. The government's capacity to provide educational services remains weak, and still over 30% of children in the country are hard to reach and do not have access to primary education. This paper discusses the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs) in the provision of primary education by supplementing governmental efforts. Through the exploration of forms of services delivered by NGOs and FBOs, this paper argues that the collaborating work among the government, NGOs, and FBOs has made progress towards achieving Education for All (EFA) in Sierra Leone. This study is based on the author's field research, which involved observation of schools, interviews with teachers, government officials, and those engaged in NGOs and FBOs, and questionnaires completed by pupils, parents, and teachers.

Keywords: Education for All; non-governmental organisations; faith-based organisations; Sierra Leone

1. Introduction

Since the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000, wider participation by stakeholders in efforts to achieve Education for All (EFA) by 2015 has been promoted with a strong emphasis on the importance of civil society participation in the development process towards achieving the goal. This relates closely to the point that aid allocation goes not only to governments but also to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and charity groups who work closely with beneficiaries.

Sierra Leone is a post-conflict country. The decade of the civil war resulted in an estimated 20,000 deaths, over two million displacements, and thousands of injured or maimed individuals through human rights abuses. Most of the social, economic and physical infrastructure of the country was destroyed. About 50% of health and educational facilities were vandalised, and in terms of primary education, nearly 90% of the school buildings across the country were completely destroyed or heavily damaged (Bennell, Harding, and Rogers-Wright 2004, 84). Around 70% of the population lives in poverty with more than two-thirds of the people categorised as living in extreme poverty (Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) 2005, 25). The government has also been impoverished by the war, and has largely been dependent on foreign donors; approximately half of the government budget is donor funded (GoSL 2005, 48). Furthermore, a global partnership between developing countries

*Email: mikako70@hotmail.com, mnishimuko@ioe.ac.uk

and donors, the EFA-Fast Track Initiative (FTI) is seen as a vehicle for providing technical and financial support to accelerate progress towards EFA-related goals, endorsed Sierra Leone's education sector plan since 2007 (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) 2007). This is because Sierra Leone is one of the fragile states that without significant donor assistance, cannot get on track for meeting EFA by 2015. Currently the government does not have the capacity to provide all of the aspects that are necessary for a suitable environment to achieve EFA. In this respect, the role of non-state providers, particularly civil society organisations (CSOs), in the provision of education, is critical.

The purpose of this paper is to address the role of NGOs and faith-based organisations (FBOs) in supplementing the government's provision of primary education in Sierra Leone. To do so, this paper first discusses the role of CSOs in development with particular reference to NGOs and FBOs, which have been increasingly active in the development of education. Second, primary education in Sierra Leone is outlined. Subsequently, the methodology used in this study is explained. Further, this paper discusses the case of Sierra Leone based on the author's field research in order to examine the NGOs and FBOs' efforts in making progress towards EFA. In conclusion, this paper argues that NGOs and FBOs are key stakeholders in Sierra Leone's progress towards achieving EFA, and their role in the development of education continues to be very active and significant, considering the fact that the highly aid-dependent government's capacity to provide public services remains weak.

2. The role of CSOs in development

Many governments in Africa cannot afford to provide sufficient allocation for the education sector without support from donors. The international community has been seeking ways to use and distribute aid more effectively in order to better reach the poor. CSOs are seen as important emissaries in this area. Rose (2007, 1) argues that since 'the state has been unable to fulfill its role in extending access of appropriate quality to all children in the context of the Education for All (EFA)', the role of non-state providers which deliver services to the 'under-served' is being considered. The role of CSOs is seen as particularly relevant for impoverished fragile countries, such as Sierra Leone.

Harber (2002) argues that civil society is not motivated by personal profit, and has its own understandings of social improvement and works for the public good. The institutions of civil society are called CSOs, and this paper regards NGOs and FBOs as important examples of CSOs. This is because NGOs and FBOs can reach the community groups they work for and they have significantly contributed to the provision of education in Sierra Leone. Furthermore, Rao and Smyth (2005) assert that EFA initiatives brought the connection between the government and NGOs closer to becoming an absolute necessity for maintaining working relationships. Therefore, examining the roles of NGOs and FBOs in facilitating progress toward EFA is important in the context of finding effective and sustainable development outcomes related to EFA.

2.1. NGOs in development

In response to the perceived failure of state-led development during the 1970s and 1980s, the number of NGOs has increased greatly with accompanied achievements

(Fowler 2000; Lewis 1998). NGOs are involved in a vast array of development areas such as improvements in health, education, agriculture, industrial sectors, human rights, and gender and environmental issues (Lewis 1998). Fowler (2000, 12) points to their roles in development as follows – although he uses the word ‘expectations’ rather than ‘roles’: (1) cost effectively helping expand access to, and effectively delivering, tangible services such as health and education to the vulnerable; (2) having a positive influence within society; (3) engendering people-centred social development processes, and building local capacity; (4) gaining ‘leverage on national and international policies that condition progress towards social development goals’; (5) acting as watchdogs of the public good and safeguarding the interests of the disadvantaged and marginalised; (6) having a positive influence on the quality of aid practices, through interactions with donors; and (7) maintaining ‘voters’ motivation to support tax allocations for aid’.

There have been some changes in NGOs’ roles and relationships between international or Northern NGOs and local, national or Southern NGOs over the last couple of decades. Although until the 1980s it was common for many international NGOs to operate their own development projects and programmes, many of them have moved from such an implementation approach to one in which their Southern partner NGOs do most of the work with the funds provided by international NGOs, as bilateral and multilateral donors do when working with Southern NGOs. This approach has led to international NGOs working on capacity building as a key objective in areas such as helping capacity building of local partner NGOs and capacity building of government institutions in developing countries (Fowler 2000). In this respect, Rose (2007) indicates that in countries that the Department for International Development (DFID) prioritises, international NGOs are often channels for donor funds and work with national NGOs. Furthermore, when a fragile state is in post-conflict transition, international NGOs engage the government to build capacity and establish policy framework (Rose 2007).

As NGOs gain more power and play bigger roles in development than ever before, a general criticism of them is also raised. For example, when NGOs gain much needed funds for operations and, in return, work on programmes under close supervision of governments or donors, they can be seen as mediators, service deliverers, convenient consultants or inexpensive contractors (Smillie in Smillie and Helmich 1999; Hudock 1999). Although NGOs may regard the relationship with donors as a dialogue on policy, donors may see them as implementers of projects. Hudock (1999, 2) points out that in this case the ‘NGOs are essentially contractors and are little more than extensions of donor agencies’. Many NGOs accept this type of situation because it enables them to obtain much greater resources than would otherwise be the case and allows them to scale up their work, which can make them more effective. However, these criticisms highlight the fact that NGOs can do what other actors, such as states and donor agencies, cannot do, and fill gaps left by the partial service delivery of governments that have been withdrawing from the provision of public services. Furthermore, while governments are seen as hierarchical and autocratic, NGOs are seen as having comparative advantages in the areas of cost effectiveness, reaching the poor, popular participation, flexibility, and innovation (Smillie in Smillie and Helmich 1999; Hudock 1999). Therefore, NGOs’ involvement in development can make a significant contribution to development outcomes.

2.2. FBOs in development

Colonialism brought Africa formal education through Christian missionaries, and the spread of Islam also led to the provision of education throughout the continent (Daun 2000). For example, Sierra Leone's development of Christian education in British colonial times started in 1808¹ when the colonial government handed over the control of education to the Christian missions, and missions established schools, higher education and clinics (MEST 2007). Islam has been in West Africa for over 1000 years (Kaplan et al. 1976). Islamic institutions were established in the northern hinterland of Sierra Leone through traders and missionaries. Missions set up Koranic schools and schools not only for basic education, but also higher education and clinics (Fyle 1981). While after achieving independence schools were nationalised, missions have continued to play important roles in managing schools and in the development of education (MEST 2007). Currently, about 75% of primary schools are owned and managed by FBOs in Sierra Leone (Bennell, Harding, and Rogers-Wright 2004, 81). Shao (in Belshaw, Calderisi, and Sugden 2001) also points out that the reasons why churches have been involved in services related to health, education and water supply in Sub-Saharan Africa are due to the provision in these areas in the colonial era and because of the current great need for these services. Shao points out that people tend to seek help from a church when a government is not able to build a clinic in a village. Religious organisations have had a solid foundation of work in social development.

Belshaw (2005, 4) describes the advantages of FBOs' development work as follows: (1) the long-term commitment to their memberships as they have served the community for a long time; (2) the majority of the members are likely to consist of the poorest and most marginalised in developing countries; (3) links to sister organisations that possibly provide funding and expertise; (4) emphasis on the 'golden rule' (i.e. treat others as you yourself wish to be treated) as a guide to social relationships; and (5) spiritual and relational experiences that can raise the self-regard and confidence of marginalised people and help them benefit from new opportunities. Thus, as FBOs have often worked in communities for a considerable period of time, they can engage in long-term commitment to work while obtaining the people's trust. Furthermore, Belshaw, Calderisi, and Sugden (2001, 6) indicate that religion provides consolation to people, including the poor, and is part of 'their personal identity, the foundation of their sense of community, and the basis of their hope'. This is because many people trust religious leaders and respect religious norms and values in many areas of Africa as it is part of, or even central to, their lives. In such areas, FBOs influence people on conduct, ethics, and morality. Therefore, FBOs' involvement in the public arena can be a powerful tool to bring about positive effects, especially in terms of the development of health and education through creating awareness of the importance of education and health issues to the community.

There are some potential weaknesses including the following: restricted beneficiaries of faith-based allegiance, the possibility for a top-down manner in policies and action, and the possibility for integration into a state political structure or favouring of elites in society. There is also a view that as FBOs tend to engage in long-term work based on pursuing their religious mandate, they may be lacking in a focus on results and professionalism (Belshaw 2005). Nonetheless, considering FBOs' crucial advantages of probably being closer to the poor and to their moral

and spiritual ties than any other development stakeholders, the role of FBOs in development work can be very significant. This is because FBOs are often deeply rooted in the communities that they serve.

3. Primary education in Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, there are three main types of schools available for formal education: government schools, government-assisted schools, and private schools. A government school is defined as a school managed by or on behalf of the MEST and is often owned by the local government and district council. A government-assisted school is mainly established by religious organisations and is recognised and assisted by the government in terms of the provision of teaching and learning materials, teachers' salaries and school subsidies. A private school is established by an individual and is run by a private business without receiving public funds. All types of schools use the same curriculum and syllabus.

As a member of the international community, Sierra Leone implemented universal primary education (UPE) in 1993 with assistance from donors. Under the UPE scheme, the new education system of 6-3-3-4, which entails six years of primary education, three years of junior secondary education, three years of senior secondary education, and four years of university education has been adopted. The new system gradually replaced the old one that was inherited in British colonial times. New curricula and syllabi were also introduced which aimed to 'rapidly enhance literacy and improve the educational opportunities for women and girls, rural dwellers and those disadvantaged in the acquiring of formal education' (GoSL 2004, 4). For this, new subjects such as indigenous languages and Sierra Leone Studies which aim to enhance a proper and positive understanding of Sierra Leone, were introduced in the curriculum. That is, in order to encompass all children, including those who were out of school, the new curriculum explicitly reflects the values and needs of Sierra Leonean children and society, strengthening more indigenous cultural values and technical and vocational elements than before.

The government also introduced a policy of free primary education (FPE) in 2000 in order to achieve the international goals associated with EFA and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Under the policy, the government began paying tuition fees and providing teaching and learning materials and core textbooks, and since 2001 they have carried the responsibility for National Primary School Education (NPSE) fees. The government also set a fine of up to Le500,000, imprisonment, or both for a parent or a guardian who does not send their child to school (GoSL 2004). In addition, Sierra Leone's full Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) was adopted in 2005. The government has developed and implemented the PRSP with the intention of making progress regarding the international targets set out in the EFA and MDGs and has stressed the need for this work to be conducted in a participatory manner that encourages the involvement of civil society in the country (GoSL 2005). In the education sector of the PRSP, the increased allocations have catered to implementing UPE programmes. As noted earlier, Sierra Leone is one of the fragile countries technically and financially benefiting from the EFA-FTI for the education programme development fund (MEST 2007). The government has increased its allocation to the education sector to about 23% of the national budget including donor assistance. Considering the budgeted amount for education was only 8.7% of the national budget 10 years ago,

this is a considerable improvement. Furthermore, between 48 and 50% of recurrent expenditures are allocated to primary education, and 47.7% of recurrent expenditures will continue to be spent on primary education until 2015 (Bennell, Harding, and Rogers-Wright 2004, 77; MEST 2007, 109–10).

The government's strong commitment to achieving EFA by 2015 with the FPE policy has resulted in a rapid increase in the number of enrolled pupils. The net enrolment for primary education increased from 42% in 1990 to 63.0% in 2004. In terms of the number of enrolled pupils, it increased from 659,503 in 2001/2 to 1,280,853 in 2004/5 (MEST 2007, x, 22). This is tremendous progress in terms of access to primary education. However, the government still does not have adequate ability to provide appropriate services in terms of finance, logistics, and personnel and therefore schools charge parents tuition fees to manage schools (Nishimuko 2007). Furthermore, behind the rapid increase in access to primary education, there are serious trade-offs in the quality of education provided: a high teacher–pupil ratio, a shortage of teaching and learning materials, school buildings and furniture and necessary teaching and learning hours, and low motivation on the part of teachers due to delays in paying salaries are common (Nishimuko 2007). In addition, the MEST (2007, 22) indicates that more than 30% of children at the primary education level are still out of school, and that national primary completion rates are below 60.0% (63.9% for boys and 47.6% for girls). This highlights the government's inability to provide adequate education services to all children. MEST (2007) identifies the disadvantaged group as follows: the poor, girls in certain regions, children with disabilities, orphans, and children who are acting as head of household. The 11-year war further marginalised vulnerable children. In this respect, one of MEST's (2007) strategies to include this group is to work with CSOs to reach the under-served populations.

4. Methodology

To examine the role of NGOs and FBOs in the provision of education in Sierra Leone, this research involved a literature review, observation of schools, interviews with teachers, government officials of the MEST, NGOs and FBOs, and questionnaires distributed to teachers, parents, and pupils. Among them, the main participant in terms of an NGO in this paper is an international NGO, Plan Sierra Leone. This is because Plan Sierra Leone is the fourth largest donor for education in Sierra Leone behind the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and UNICEF. Since Plan Sierra Leone is in partnership with local NGOs supporting their work, the following local NGOs were also chosen: Community Animation and Development Organisation (CADO), Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), and Pikin to Pikin Movement. These international and local NGOs share common goals and approaches such as improving education for children, women and the community, and a child-focused approach. Regarding FBOs, based on availability and willingness to co-operate, the following FBOs were the participants in this study: Ansarul Development Services (Islamic FBO), Sierra Leone Muslim Brotherhood (Islamic FBO), and the Methodist Church of Sierra Leone (Christian FBO). Other participants included 125 teachers, 454 parents, and 488 pupils from 27 primary schools located in five towns, including Freetown, Bo, Moyamba, Kenema, and Makeni. To reduce geographical bias, towns in the east, west, south, and north of Sierra Leone were chosen. As the majority of schools throughout Sierra Leone are

faith-based, 11 Christian schools and 10 Islamic schools were chosen as samples in addition to five municipal schools and one private school. The fieldwork was conducted from April to July 2005.

5. The case of Sierra Leone: the role of CSOs

The government has supported government schools and government-assisted schools mainly in the following areas: (1) paying teachers' salaries; (2) providing learning and teaching materials; (3) the construction and rehabilitation of schools; (4) providing Le2000 per pupil per term for school subsidies; and (5) offering scholarships. However, the government's ability to support education is not adequate and NGOs and FBOs have played a significant role in assisting the development of education in Sierra Leone.

5.1. NGOs

The largest international NGO in the education sector, Plan Sierra Leone has been working for education renewal in Sierra Leone and has assisted many government schools and government-assisted schools. Their work includes: (1) the construction and rehabilitation of primary schools; (2) providing school furniture; (3) training teachers through workshops, as some are not trained and/or qualified; (4) providing distance learning for unqualified teachers who cannot move out their town; (5) providing refresher courses for qualified teachers; (6) distributing school materials to help run schools properly, including pens, pencils, teaching and learning materials, record books, registers and chalk; (7) providing recreational kits to schools for the war-traumatised children, such as footballs, volleyballs, handballs, skipping ropes; (8) promoting peace education; (9) supporting local NGOs that share common goals with Plan Sierra Leone; (10) building the capacity of MEST's district offices; and (11) supporting the revision and printing of primary school syllabi.

As noted earlier, the FPE policy has led to a considerable increase in enrolment. The rapid increase has been accompanied by a rise in the teacher–pupil ratio: it increased to 1:67 in 2005 from 1:52 in 2004 and 1:37 in 2001 (UNESCO 2005, 269; GoSL 2006, 62), despite the construction and renovation of school buildings by the government and partner agencies. Although Plan Sierra Leone has operated in several areas of the country, examining the Moyamba district would highlight their intervention in constructing school buildings and providing learning materials and in-service training for teachers as they appointed Moyamba as their model district and have supported more primary schools there than elsewhere (over 400 primary schools as of May 2005). For example, Table 1 shows teacher–pupil ratios. The figures for Moyamba are to some extent a reflection of Plan Sierra Leone's dynamic work in the area of constructing and rehabilitating school buildings, which is helping to keep in check teacher–pupil ratios in classrooms.

As seen, in this study, in total, only 8.8% of classes in my sample met the government recommended teacher–pupil ratio of 1:40, including one private school. However, in Moyamba, the majority of classes had less than 60 pupils per teacher, a relatively good number compared to the samples in other areas. Freetown is the capital of Sierra Leone and Bo is the second biggest town, which means they have better infrastructure and often attract more aid agencies than other areas. Teacher–pupil ratios higher than 1:100 were found in schools in Kenema and Makeni, where

Table 1. Teacher–pupil ratios ($N=125$ teachers).

	Freetown	Bo	Moyamba	Kenema	Makeni	Total
Poverty in district (%)						
Urban	17.1	59.9	59.0	77.5	83.4	54.3
Rural	70.1	67.8	69.0	95.0	90.0	78.9
Teacher–pupil ratio						
1–40	2 (7.4%)	4 (private 4) (13.3%)	4 (19.0%)	0 (0%)	1 (5.0%)	11 (private 4) (8.8%)
41–60	14 (51.9%)	20 (66.7%)	12 (57.1%)	1 (3.7%)	7 (35.0%)	54 (43.2%)
61–80	10 (37.0%)	5 (16.7%)	3 (14.3%)	7 (25.9%)	3 (15.0%)	28 (22.4%)
81–100	0 (0%)	1 (3.3%)	0 (0%)	5 (18.5%)	1 (5.0%)	7 (5.6%)
>100	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	14 (51.9%)	7 (35.0%)	21 (16.8%)
No answer	1 (3.7%)	0	2 (9.5%)	0	1 (5.0%)	4 (3.2%)
Total	27 (100%)	30 (100%)	21 (100%)	27 (100%)	20 (100%)	125 (100%)

Source: Author's field data for the teacher–pupil ratio; GoSL (2005, 27) for the percentage poverty in districts.

the poverty is more severe. In Kenema, more than half of the samples show that the teacher–pupil ratio is more than 1:100. Plan Sierra Leone has also worked in Makeni, but not on the same scale as in Moyamba.

Furthermore, although double-shifts at schools to reduce severe congestion in classrooms are very common in Sierra Leone, surprisingly, there was no double-shift school in Moyamba. The problem with double-shift schools is that because two schools use one school building in the morning and the afternoon, it is difficult to secure enough time to teach and learn following the syllabus. The impact of work by Plan Sierra Leone was very significant, considering most schools without NGOs' support had severe problems concerning the infrastructure, security, facilities and equipment. Not only has Plan Sierra Leone made physical contributions, such as constructing and rehabilitating school buildings and providing teaching and learning materials and recreation kits, but they have also provided workshops and refresher courses for teachers, as nationally about 40% of teachers are unqualified (MEST 2007, 23). This level of support is reflected in the way classroom teaching occurred in Moyamba, where children had their own textbooks and notebooks, which is not common in other parts of Sierra Leone where teachers did not even have their own teaching materials and school textbooks for teachers were often kept in a locked drawer so as not to be lost or stolen. The government (GoSL 2008) states that the textbook–pupil ratio countrywide is still not satisfactory, but Moyamba district is a notable exception, to a large extent because Plan Sierra Leone distributes materials to schools on behalf of the government. Moreover, the government established a School Management Committee (SMC) in all primary schools to assist in the management of the school and serve as a bridge between the school and local community. Plan Sierra Leone supports the MEST by carrying out the necessary training of SMCs to build their capacity. Furthermore, together with Plan Sierra Leone, local NGOs such as CADO, FAWE and the Pikin to Pikin Movement also promote peace and health education in schools, as well as provide training and emphasise the importance of girls' education and the issue of human rights at a community level, by raising awareness of the rights of the disabled and vulnerable. These activities by NGOs help promote access to schooling, make teachers and children more motivated, and make people aware that they are part of a community.

However, it would be worth noting that although these international and local NGOs share common goals, because of the positioning of donors and as recipients of funds, some projects could reflect more donor NGO's intentions rather than community needs. This is seen in the following comments of local NGO staff:

As a whole, they leave us with no option but to accept the conditions just to keep the organisation going. The projects most times are not community demand driven, but donor demand driven.

The donor tells us what projects they prefer to be implemented using their funds. Some say to build schools, while others want to train teachers etc. You cannot use the one for construction for training, even if it is a pressing issue.

These views show the difficult position of local NGOs who are financially dependent on the international NGO. However, in this study local NGOs argued that they could identify the local needs more adequately than Plan Sierra Leone, and Plan Sierra Leone also stated that they often counted on local NGOs' needs-assessments and surveys. In addition, there are some positive views of their relationship; Plan Sierra Leone has supported capacity building of local NGOs in terms of staff, skills

and logistics so that local NGOs can play a leading role in projects reflecting the local needs. That is, the partnership between the international and local NGOs could reach more people, cover more regions and reflect local needs for their comparative advantages, and the partnership can increase the local NGOs' capacity.

5.2. FBOs

In Sierra Leone, the government has a reputation for being unbiased and tolerant with regard to religion and Christian and Islamic groups work in collaboration when necessary. This religious tolerance owes a great deal to the influence of the Inter-religious Council Sierra Leone (IRCSL). IRCSL is a national multi-religious organisation dedicated to promoting co-operation and peace among the religious communities. It greatly contributed to the end of the war by mediating negotiations between the government and rebels. This is an important reason why people in Sierra Leone respect religious leaders greatly. Many Sierra Leoneans have a relatively good level of understanding of, and respect for, both faiths. This view is supported by two aspects: the first is inter-religious marriage, which is becoming more common, according to some parent and teacher participants. In Sierra Leone, it is often the case that a wedding ceremony in a church is followed by another ceremony in a mosque, with the marriage being celebrated in both traditions; second, this research indicates that there is a kind of 'flexibility' in the way people practise their religion. This is shown in the finding that teachers' religion does not always match the school's faith, as seen in Table 2.

This 'flexibility' between school faith and individual religion was not only about teachers but also pupils in this study. If Sierra Leone was a solely Islamic state and Sierra Leoneans were strict in their denomination, this kind of inter-religious marriage and differences between the faith of the school and that of teachers and pupils would not be possible. Furthermore, considering that FBOs are involved in teacher recruitment of faith-based schools, the finding that teachers' religion does not necessarily match the school faith shows that not only teachers but also religious leaders in Sierra Leone are highly tolerant of religious otherness, understanding and respecting for both faiths. Overall, these examples show Sierra Leone's religious tolerance.

Religious leaders have said that they stand for democracy and development of the country. For example, FBOs in Sierra Leone, such as Ansarul Development Services, Sierra Leone Muslim Brotherhood and Methodist Church of Sierra Leone,

Table 2. School faith and teachers' religion ($N=125$ teachers).

	Christian schools	Islamic schools	Municipal schools	Private school
No. of schools	11	10	5	6
No. of teachers	56	41	24	4
	47 Christians (83.9%)	15 Christians (36.6%)	11 Christians (45.8%)	2 Christians (50.0%)
	9 Muslims (16.1%)	26 Muslims (63.4%)	13 Muslims (54.2%)	2 Muslims (50.0%)

Source: Author's field data.

have contributed greatly to the development of education. The role of FBOs in formal education is found as follows: (1) obtaining land for school construction; (2) construction and rehabilitation of schools; (3) provision of vehicles, furniture, teaching and learning materials from time to time; (4) offering scholarships to teachers for further study; (5) offering scholarships to pupils; (6) regular visits to schools for monitoring purposes; (7) recruitment of teachers; (8) training of Arabic teachers and offering in-service training for Religious and Moral Education; (9) producing religious literature for schools and churches or mosques; (10) occasionally making up teachers' salaries when teachers have not been paid by the government; (11) sensitising parents at churches or mosques so they send their children to schools; and (12) establishing and disseminating a code of conduct to maintain morality in school and community.

The government often asks FBOs to propose and implement projects, offering grants to them. This is because even in remote rural areas there are churches and mosques and FBO networks which are very helpful in establishing schools and sensitising communities about the importance of education. Separate from the district inspectors, religious leaders also visit schools to monitor the management of schools. They also attend an end-of-term assembly, make a speech and give special awards to those with excellent academic results. Furthermore, while Plan Sierra Leone contributes to SMC training through assisting the MEST, a religious leader is one of the SMC members in faith-based schools. Therefore, they work closely with schools and their contributions are appreciated by teachers and parents. In this study, 96.8% of teachers and 96.5% of parents thought religion (Christianity/Islam) contributes to education. The following are respondents' views on the educational contribution of FBOs: (1) moral and spiritual contribution to children's character; (2) establishment of school; (3) Religious and Moral Education as a subject; (4) provision of scholarships; (5) provision of school materials; and (6) promoting education.

However, it is worth noting that FBOs in Sierra Leone often do not have sufficient funds and the scale of their support using their resources would be often smaller than NGOs. Methodist church staff said that after independence, the missions could not maintain bigger schools because they lost financial support from the UK, and today they do less than the government since the government took over the schools. Considering the outcome that some teachers and parents appreciated the religious contribution in the establishment of schools, they might reckon that FBOs assume full responsibility for the school establishment because those schools are faith-based. In this respect, the MEST (2007, 11) states 'many [FBOs] provide no [financial] support, however, for the maintenance and development of schools and institutions bearing their names' with an exaggerating tone.

Moreover, considering their close relationship to the community, the most effective work by FBOs regardless of the region – remote or town areas – could be their powerful impact in terms of sensitisation. This was pointed out by many parents and the following comment shows it clearly:

We learn most things from churches or mosques such as health and family issues including AIDS and its prevention. It shapes moral and behaviours of children. Religious leaders help sensitise people to promote education in churches or mosques.

Some local NGO staff also asked religious leaders to help with sensitisation in terms of the importance of education, to assist with placing an emphasis on girls' education

and to introduce their members to workshops operated by the NGOs. This shows how FBOs and religious leaders influence people in Sierra Leone and how their participation in the development of education can bring about positive outcomes including in rural areas. Thus, being close to the people, good networks and coverage across the country are FBOs' strong comparative advantages in development work, and their contribution to access to education is significant.

6. Conclusion

Plan Sierra Leone's dynamic work positively changes the learning environment by reducing the teacher–pupil ratio, providing school supplies including learning and teaching materials and in-service training for teachers, in addition to constructing and rehabilitating school infrastructure. Plan Sierra Leone showed that NGOs can work more practically, efficiently, and effectively in the areas mentioned above. A decent physical infrastructure is a minimum condition for education. In a post-conflict situation, the work of Plan Sierra Leone is significant to enhance access to primary schools and the school environment.

Collaboration between international NGOs and local NGOs allows the maximisation of financial resources for their work discussed, because local NGOs have a greater ability to identify local needs, while the international NGO has better access to funds. Using enough funds, Plan Sierra Leone could operate on a large scale reflecting government policy. Plan Sierra Leone's work extends to areas the government usually controls, such as the provision of school supplies and workshops for teachers, capacity building for MEST district offices, and supporting the revision and printing of syllabi. These initiatives show that Plan Sierra Leone clearly supplements the government's services in the provision of education and makes progress in achieving EFA. Furthermore, as Fowler (2000) and Rose (2007) point out that many international NGOs help capacity building of local NGOs and the government, in Sierra Leone, Plan Sierra Leone's partnership with local NGOs enables these national NGOs to contribute to a smaller scale of work which includes establishing health and peace clubs at schools and grassroots advocacy work at the community level. Plan Sierra Leone takes on a larger scale of work including dynamic school construction and rehabilitation and capacity building of the government and local NGOs. Making use of comparative advantages of an international NGO and grassroots local NGOs could reach the government's 'underserved' (Rose 2007, 1), cover more regions, and address even more local needs in their operation.

In contrast, FBOs in Sierra Leone often do not have as much access to sufficient funds as some local NGOs. Consequently, the work of FBOs is often on a much smaller scale than the work of NGOs in terms of construction and rehabilitation of school buildings and provision of material supplies. However, as noted, since religious leaders played a significant role in ending the bloody war, they are greatly respected. Sierra Leoneans trust religious leaders and religions influence people in conduct, ethics, and morality, while providing emotional, moral, and spiritual support. Therefore, the impact of FBOs, which could mobilise people in sensitising important issues, such as encouraging education, is significant. As FBOs are rooted in the communities that they serve and cover wide regions, their widespread network is also a strong point. Consequently, the government and NGOs ask FBOs for their co-operation in school construction and advocacy work. That is, in Sierra Leone,

FBOs supply powerful influence in sensitising local communities to make progress in EFA.

It is also noteworthy that EFA in Sierra Leone initiated the close relationship between the government, NGOs, and FBOs. Plan Sierra Leone is indispensable for the MEST since they assist capacity building of MEST's district offices and the revision and printing of primary school syllabi on top of contributions in other areas mentioned. The international NGO is involved in a government arena of the provision of educational services. The government regards local NGOs and FBOs as service providers or regional implementing partners, and Hudock (1999, 4) points out that when Southern NGOs receive funds from the government, 'their legitimacy as non-governmental actors is eroded and their relationship with clients at the field level are compromised'. This issue centres on the nature of the word 'contractor' (Smillie in Smillie and Helmich 1999; Hudock 1999), and can apply to FBOs too. Some local NGO staff also pointed out that they experienced some projects with donor driven rather than community needs. However, as my local NGO participants also pointed out, working with donors can be regarded as part of a process of capacity building of their organisation, and local NGOs and FBOs can use the opportunity to work with donors and the government to enhance their capacity. As outlined earlier, the government has encouraged the involvement of CSOs under the PRSP because both local NGOs and FBOs are close to the community and reach the beneficiaries of development projects. This study showed that when the government's ability to provide education is not adequate, collaboration between the government, NGOs and FBOs brings about effective outcomes and their involvement in development projects is vital. This is because local NGOs and FBOs can reach the poor and marginalised. When the intended beneficiaries are involved, the development programmes can be more beneficial to them, and the outcomes can be more sustainable (Rao and Smyth 2005). Therefore, considering these positives, the role of NGOs and FBOs in the development of education in Sierra Leone is important to achieve the goal of EFA.

Furthermore, it is necessary to add that although this paper focuses on the roles of NGOs and FBOs in the provision of education, it does not have space to discuss the massive challenges Sierra Leone has in order to achieve EFA by 2015. As Sierra Leone is a post-conflict country, the overall capacity of the government and local development stakeholders remains weak. The government has enacted a series of education reforms including the introduction of the new education system, curriculum, and FPE policy, and has worked for the development of education. NGOs and FBOs have significantly contributed to the provision of education, as discussed. However, considering that still over 30% of children are out of school, about 40% of children do not complete primary education, and there are trade-offs in the quality of education provided, there is much work to do in order to achieve EFA-related goals. This suggests that the role of CSOs such as NGOs and FBOs will remain very active in the area of development of education.

Finally, in order for Sierra Leone to move forward in achieving regular access to quality of EFA, this paper recommends that relationships among development stakeholders need to be re-considered, so that aid to Sierra Leone can be used more effectively than it is being used currently. Firstly, donors and the government of Sierra Leone need to further strengthen links with NGOs, considering their comparative advantages discussed. Secondly, donors need to recognise the FBOs' contributions and comparative advantages and strengthen links with FBOs.

However, this study has limitations of examining how to channel aid to FBOs efficiently and without causing political tensions. Therefore, it is suggested that further study in this area is required.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Moses Oketch for his continued encouragement and invaluable insights and suggestions throughout my research. I am also grateful to Pauline Rose and the editors and reviewers of *Compare* for their very helpful feedback on earlier drafts of the paper.

Note

1. It is worth clarifying that the first Christian school in Sierra Leone was started by the black immigrants from Nova Scotia in 1792. The Nova Scotians were ex-slaves who had fought under the British flag in the American War of Independence and were freed in Sierra Leone (Kaplan et al. 1976).

References

- Belshaw, D. 2005. Enhancing the development capability of civil society organisations, with particular reference to Christian Faith-based Organisations (CFBOs). Paper presented at the conference on Reclaiming Development: Assessing the Contributions of Non-governmental Organisations to Development Alternatives, June, in Manchester. <http://www.gprg.org/pubs/workingpapers/pdfs/gprg-wps-035.pdf> (accessed November 27, 2007).
- Belshaw, D., R. Calderisi, and C. Sugden, eds. 2001. *Faith in development: Partnership between the World Bank and the churches of Africa*. Oxford: Regnum Books International.
- Bennell, P., J. Harding, and S. Rogers-Wright. 2004. *PRSP education sector review*. Freetown: British Council Sierra Leone.
- Daun, H. 2000. Primary education in Sub-Saharan Africa – A moral issue, an economic matter, or both? *Comparative Education* 36: 37–53.
- Fowler, A. 2000. *Civil society, NGOs and social development: Chasing the rules of the game*. Geneva: UNRISD.
- Fyle, C. 1981. *The history of Sierra Leone*. London: Evans Brothers.
- Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL). 2004. *The Education Act, 2004*. <http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/2004-2p.pdf> (accessed November 27, 2006).
- Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL). 2005. *Poverty reduction strategy paper*. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2005/cr05191.pdf> (accessed November 27, 2006).
- Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL). 2006. *Poverty reduction strategy paper*. <http://imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2007/cr0717.pdf> (accessed October 10, 2007).
- Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL). 2008. *Poverty reduction strategy progress report 2005–2007*. [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPRS1/Resources/SierraLeone-APR2_PRSP\(July2008\).pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPRS1/Resources/SierraLeone-APR2_PRSP(July2008).pdf) (accessed December 9, 2008).
- Harber, C. 2002. Education, democracy and poverty reduction in Africa. *Comparative Education* 38: 267–76.
- Hudock, A.C. 1999. *NGOs and civil society: Democracy by proxy?* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Kaplan, I., M. Dobert, J. McLaughlin, B. Marvin, and D. Whitaker. 1976. *Area handbook for Sierra Leone*. Washington, DC: American University.
- Lewis, D. 1998. Development NGOs and the challenge of partnership: Changing relations between North and South. *Social Policy and Administration* 32: 501–12.
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST). 2007. *Sierra Leone education sector plan: A road map to a better future*. http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Sierra%20Leone/Sierra_Leone_ESP.pdf (accessed October 30, 2007).
- Nishimuko, M. 2007. Problems behind Education for All (EFA): The case of Sierra Leone. *Educate* 7, no. 2: 19–29, [http://www.educatejournal.org/index.php?journal=educate&page=article&op=view&path\[\]=115&path\[\]=141](http://www.educatejournal.org/index.php?journal=educate&page=article&op=view&path[]=115&path[]=141) (accessed January 10, 2008).

- Rao, N., and I. Smyth. 2005. *Partnerships for girls' education*. Oxford: Oxfam.
- Rose, P. 2007. *Supporting non-state providers in basic education service delivery*. CREATE Pathways to Access, Research Monograph no. 4. Brighton: Centre for International Education, University of Sussex. <http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf%20documents/PTA4.pdf> (accessed October 10, 2007).
- Smillie, I., and H. Helmich, eds. 1999. *Stakeholders: Government-NGO partnerships for international development*. London: Earthscan Publication.
- UNESCO. 2005. *Education for All in Africa: Paving the way for action*. Dakar: UNESCO.

Copyright of *Compare: A Journal of Comparative & International Education* is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.